

# NAVAL WREN

WREN: A woman who serves in the non-commissioned ranks of the Royal Canadian Navy.

## HISTORY AND IMPORTANCE

Women were first enrolled for naval service during the First World War, to serve in an auxiliary to the British Navy known as the Women's Royal Naval Service. From the abbreviation of this title, WRNS, women in the British Navy came to be known as "wrens".

Although the first women's naval service was limited in scope and numbers, it gave valuable service in the war. Its members set the high standard of efficiency and devotion to duty that is the criterion of women's naval services today.

In the Second World War, there again arose an urgent need for women to replace the men of the navy in certain types of jobs. In 1939, the WRNS was re-established. At the height of the war, their numbers reached 75,000. Wrens performed many types of work ashore, and in some cases manned small harbour vessels. Many were decorated for bravery.

During the Second World War, Canada also felt the need for a naval force of women. In January, 1942, under the guidance of British wren officers, recruiting for a Canadian force began. This force was known as the Women's Royal Canadian Naval Service, abbreviated to WRCNS, and its members were also known as "wrens". More than 6,000 women were enrolled, to serve in shore radio stations, hospitals, offices—wherever there was a job that could be done by women to release men for sea duty. More than 500 served overseas. By their devotion to the service, by their pride in themselves and their uniform, these women established a reputation for high standards which earned them the respect of all who knew them. When the Second World War ended, the WRCNS was disbanded.

In 1951, during the Korean war, the need for a small women's naval force was again realized, and it was decided to enrol a limited number of women into the Royal Canadian Naval Reserve to serve on a full-time basis. Wrens were enrolled to serve in the regular force of the Royal Canadian Navy on a career basis for the first time in 1955.

Today, wrens provide the navy with a small, highly-trained nucleus of women whose numbers could be expanded rapidly in the event of emergency. Applicants are selected carefully.

## NATURE OF THE WORK

Most wrens are employed on Canada's east coast, in naval establishments where they support the fleet by their work in operations, communications, secretarial and accounting offices, and as medical aides in Canadian Forces hospitals. These are fields in which women have an aptitude and can most easily replace men required for duty at sea.

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The duties of a naval operations wren include: the operation, checking and routine servicing of certain underwater detection sets, plotting tables, radar presentations and surface and air warning sets; the preparation, despatch and reception of voice messages; the operation of direction finding equipment and the preparation and control of training exercises.

A typical secretarial wren is employed in duties such as typing, mailing and filing naval correspondence, maintaining records of service personnel, compiling reports and arranging transportation for personnel travelling on duty. An accounts wren is responsible for the preparation and maintenance of pay records for naval personnel, the computation of income tax, travelling and expense claims, and the preparation of cash vouchers and receipts.

A wren in the medical trade would be employed in a hospital of the Canadian Forces Medical Service where her duties would include the care and treatment of patients, under the supervision of service doctors and nurses; the administration of sick bays; the requisitioning, storing and accounting for drugs, medical supplies and equipment, and the operation of equipment used for diagnosis and treatment.

A communications wren, in a radio station or communications centre, receives and transmits messages by teletype, radio telegraphy and voice radio, encrypts and decrypts coded messages, and performs clerical duties such as checking message references and maintaining records.

## WORKING CONDITIONS

A wren's working conditions and places of duty vary greatly. In the stenographic field, a wren will work in modern offices under the same conditions as those of stenographers employed in industry, the Civil Service or by commercial firms.

A wren medical aide serves in modern hospitals under the supervision of service doctors and nurses in conditions similar to those found in municipal hospitals in Canada.

Some wrens are employed in naval activities such as in naval operations centres where they use modern plotting and detection equipment related to the movements of warships.

Naval operations and communication centres, and Canadian Forces hospitals, are manned 24 hours a day. The majority of wrens in naval operations work in regular shifts. Medical aides and communications operators also work in shifts, but to a lesser extent.

Participation in sports is encouraged and many facilities and opportunities are available for social and recreational activity. There are 30 days' annual leave with pay, plus time to travel for those who are stationed at a distance from their homes.

## QUALIFICATIONS NECESSARY FOR ENTRY AND SUCCESS

To be enrolled as a wren in the Royal Canadian Navy, an applicant must be a Canadian citizen, or a British subject resident in Canada with the status of a landed immigrant. She must be at least 18 and not more than 30 years of age, have grade 10 education or better, be single on enrolment and meet the medical and aptitude standards of the RCN.

Among other requirements for success as a wren are a cheerful personality, an ability to live and work in harmony as a member of a team, integrity, loyalty and a willingness to accept discipline.

## PREPARATION NEEDED

The initial naval training for wrens is given at HMCS Cornwallis, a shore establishment located in the Annapolis Valley in Nova Scotia. The training is designed to facilitate the transition from civilian to service life. Fully qualified instructors and modern training aids are employed.

New-entry wrens attend lectures which familiarize them with naval history and organization, ships, aircraft and weapons, oceanography, navigation, and protection against nuclear, biological and chemical warfare. There are classes and practical demonstrations of fire-fighting and first-aid, swimming and life-saving. Emphasis is placed on the right way to wear and care for uniform and on deportment. At least one period each day is devoted to marching and to instruction in ceremonial procedures.

During her new-entry training, a wren is selected for the trade to which she is best suited; her preferences, qualifications, aptitudes and the Navy's need for wrens in each trade are considered in the selection.

## EMPLOYMENT, ADVANCEMENT, OUTLOOK

The initial period of enrolment for a wren is three years. At the end of this time, she may apply to re-engage for further periods of service.

The promotion of wrens parallels that of the men of the Royal Canadian Navy. The progress of the wren's ability in her trade is measured in trade groups. The lowest is trade group 1 and the highest is trade group 3.

The steps to trade group advancement are on-the-job training, practical experience and formal courses. Promotion in rank depends, among other things, upon the attainment of trade group levels. With higher rank go additional pay and responsibility for supervision of subordinates.

There are six trades in which wrens serve in the Royal Canadian Navy. They are:

- Personnel Rate
- Naval Operations Wren
- Communications Operator
- Wren Secretary
- Wren Accounts
- Medical Aide.

The new entry wren is enrolled in the rank of Ordinary Wren. On completion of six months' training, she is classed as Ordinary Wren (Trained). Subject to obtaining trade Group 1 qualifications in her trade, she is promoted to Able Wren after 18 months' service. Further promotions up to rank of Wren Chief Petty Officer are subject to time in service, trade examinations, her own ability and the need for personnel in higher ranks.

Opportunities exist for wrens to become officers in the Royal Canadian Navy. In order to become a wren officer, a woman must be between the ages of 21 and 35 and have minimum education of senior matriculation. She must possess important personal characteristics such as initiative, good judgment and an ability to lead others.

A wren who does not have the minimum education but has shown that she does have the personal qualities may be selected as an officer candidate. She may be chosen to attend special courses provided by the navy in order to bring her education up to the level required.

If a wren marries but wishes to continue to serve, she may apply to remain in the navy.

## REMUNERATION

Remuneration for wrens compares favourably with that in civilian life when the extra benefits are taken into consideration. Free medical care, dental care and hospitalization, and 30 days' annual leave with pay and travelling time, all are part of a wren's total remuneration. On joining, wrens receive their uniforms at no cost and an initial allowance for underclothing. A monthly allowance for the maintenance of their uniforms is provided. Wrens are usually provided with meals and accommodation in an RCN barracks, but when this is not available a subsistence allowance of from \$65 to \$95 a month is paid.

Wrens receive the same basic and trades pay as equivalent men in the RCN.

The following are examples of the monthly pay of wrens who, in addition, are provided with meals and accommodation:

Ordinary Wren (Untrained).....	\$120
Ordinary Wren (Trained).....	127
Able Wren.....	158 to 200
Leading Wren.....	239 to 251
Wren Petty Officer Second Class.....	281 to 296
Wren Petty Officer First Class.....	313 to 331
Wren Chief Petty Officer Second Class	351 to 372

This pay includes basic pay, trade group pay, increments for years in rank (called progressive pay) and kit upkeep allowance.

Progressive increments are paid after the second, fourth, and sixth year of service in most ranks.

A pension plan on a contributory basis of 6 per cent of pay and allowances provides security for a wren who makes the navy her career. On retirement, she receives a life annuity of 2 per cent of her annual pay and allowances averaged over any consecutive six years she selects, multiplied by the number of years she has served (up to a maximum of 35 years). For example, a Wren Chief Petty Officer 2nd Class, who has served a total of 25 years and has six years in her rank, would receive an annual pension of approximately \$3,000.

## ADVANTAGES

A career as a wren offers many advantages. A wren will have opportunities for interesting and often exciting kinds of work which can never be duplicated in civilian life. She will meet people from across Canada and see new places.

A wren will have ample leisure time for recreation and to pursue hobbies. Naval establishments are well equipped for swimming, boating and sports such as softball, volleyball, tennis and badminton. Libraries are also available.

Some of the greatest rewards of service life are found in the satisfaction and pleasure gained from working with and for others as a member of the naval team in the service of Canada.

## DISADVANTAGES

A wren will have to be prepared to put her own inclinations and preferences second to the requirements of the navy. She will give up a certain degree of personal privacy, finding that she will be required to live in quarters where facilities are shared with other wrens. Certain regulations will have to be respected and obeyed so that a happy and well-ordered home is maintained for everyone.

She will also find herself serving at places far from her home, and she may be moved to new locations on short notice.

A wren will be required to fit into what is essentially a man's world with discretion and tact.

## HOW TO GET STARTED TOWARD THE OCCUPATION

A young woman who wishes to obtain further information or to apply for entry into the Royal Canadian

Navy should visit or write the nearest naval recruiting officer. Recruiting offices, listed in the telephone book, are located in the following cities:

Victoria, B.C.  
Vancouver, B.C.  
Calgary, Alta.  
Edmonton, Alta.  
Regina, Sask.  
Saskatoon, Sask.  
Winnipeg, Man.

Fort William, Ont.  
Windsor, Ont.  
London, Ont.  
Hamilton, Ont.  
Toronto, Ont.  
Kingston, Ont.  
Ottawa, Ont.

North Bay, Ont.  
Montreal, P.Q.  
Quebec City, P.Q.  
Saint John, N.B.  
Charlottetown, PEI  
Halifax, N.S.  
St. John's, Nfld.

## RELATED OCCUPATIONS

While wrens are unique by virtue of their naval background, training and uniform, they have common ground with other occupations. Wrens employed in the supply secretary trade can be compared with clerk-stenographers in business and industry. A wren in the supply accounts trade is like a bookkeeper in an office or a bank. Wren medical aides are comparable to nursing assistants, and wren personnel rates are equivalent to junior personnel administrators. The work of a wren communications operator includes that of teletype operator.

In civilian life, there is no occupation which duplicates that of a wren in the naval operations trade in which modern plotting and detection equipment is used in relation to ships, submarines and coastal air defence units, and in tactical training units.

## FOR FURTHER READING

BOOKS: *The Far Distant Ships*. By Joseph Schull. Queen's Printer, Ottawa.  
*Blue for a Girl*. By John Drummond, W.H. Allen, London.  
*Blue Tapestry*. By Dame Vera Laughton Mathews. (Out of print but available in some public libraries)

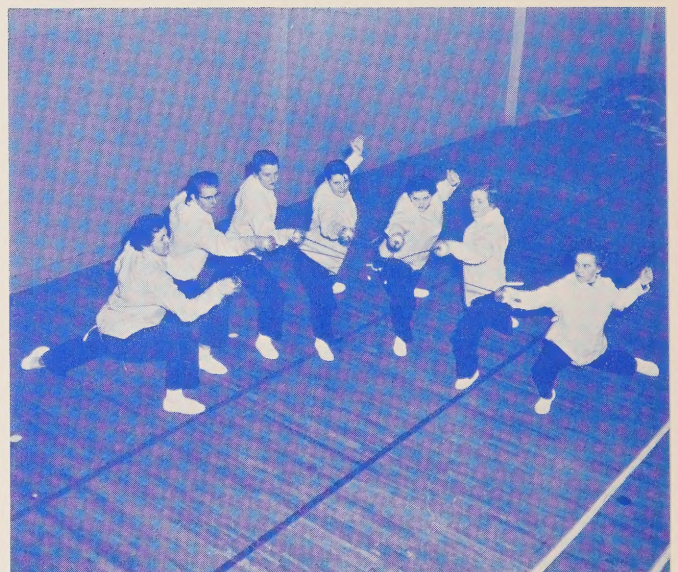
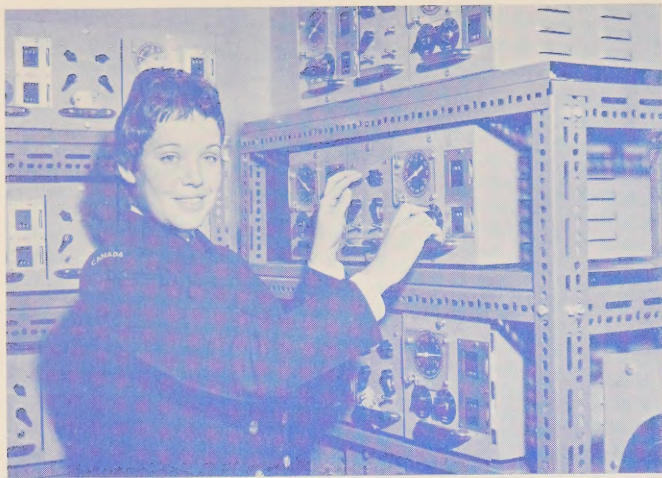
PAMPHLETS: *Serve Proudly with the Wrens*. Available from the nearest RCN Recruiting office or by writing to the Naval Secretary, Naval Headquarters, Ottawa 4, Ont.

## PERIODICALS

*The Crow'snest*. The Royal Canadian Navy's magazine, (monthly). Queen's Printer, Ottawa.

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This occupational information monograph was published in May, 1964. It was prepared by Naval Headquarters, Ottawa, and is one of a series on occupations in the Royal Canadian Navy.



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